



MANKATO COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

THE BEST WAY TO ORGANIZE YOUR COMPUTER FILES

<https://business.tutsplus.com/tutorials/how-to-organize-computer-files--cms-32191>

<https://www.howtogeek.com/howto/15677/zen-and-the-art-of-file-and-folder-organization/>

ZEN AND THE ART OF FILE AND FOLDER ORGANIZATION

- *Is your desktop a paragon of neatness, or is it overflowing with so many icons that you're scared to look at it?*
- *If you've been putting off getting organized because the task is too huge or daunting, or you don't know where to start, we've got 40 tips to get you on the path to Zen mastery of your digital filing system.*

SIGNS THAT YOUR COMPUTER IS POORLY ORGANIZED

If your computer is a mess, you're probably already aware of it. But just in case you're not, here are some tell-tale signs:

Your Desktop has over 40 icons on it

"My Documents" contains over 300 files and 60 folders, including MP3s and digital photos

You use the Windows' built-in search facility whenever you need to find a file

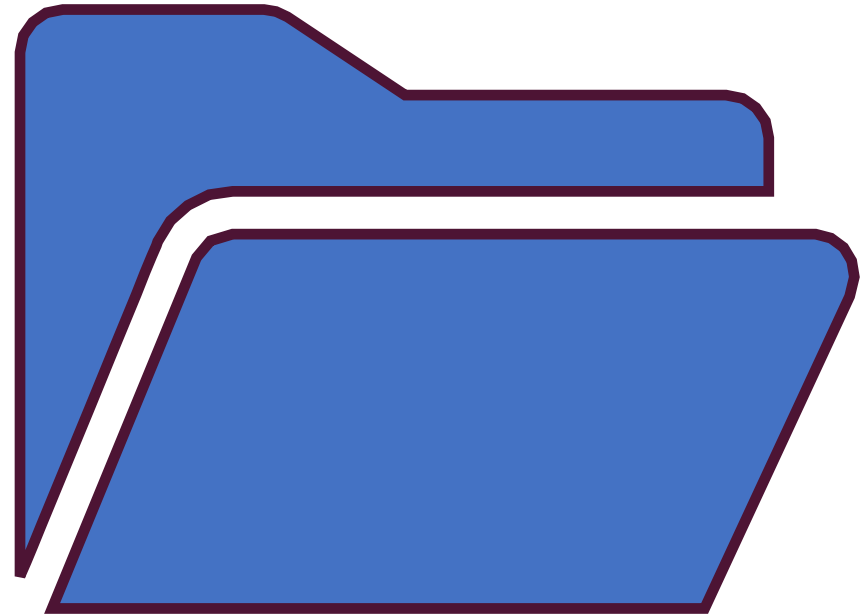
You can't find programs in the out-of-control list of programs in your Start Menu

You save all your Word documents in one folder, all your spreadsheets in a second folder, etc..

Any given file that you're looking for may be in any one of four different sets of folders

BUT BEFORE WE START, HERE ARE SOME QUICK NOTES:

- We're going to show you what files and folders are, and how to create, save, rename, copy and delete them*
- The organization principles described in this article apply equally to all computer systems.*
- We will also mention some useful features of Windows that can help you get organized.*
- Everyone has their own favorite methodology of organizing and filing, and it's all too easy to get into "My Way is Better than Your Way" arguments.*
- The reality is that there is no perfect way of getting things organized.*
- But the tips here are only one way of doing it. Hopefully some of these tips will work for you too, but please don't read this as any sort of "right" way to do it.*



WHY BOTHER ORGANIZING AT ALL?



Find files manually. Often it's not convenient, speedy or even possible to utilize your desktop search software to find what you want. It doesn't work 100% of the time, or you may not even have it installed. Sometimes it's just plain faster to go straight to the file you want, if you know it's in a particular sub-folder, rather than trawling through hundreds of search results.



Find groups of similar files (e.g. all your "work" files, all the photos of your Europe holiday in 2008, all your music videos, all the MP3s from *Dark Side of the Moon*, all your letters you wrote to your wife, all your tax returns). Clever naming of the files will only get you so far. Sometimes it's the date the file was created that's important, other times it's the file format, and other times it's the purpose of the file. How do you name a collection of files so that they're easy to isolate based on *any* of the above criteria? Short answer, you can't.



Move files to a new computer. It's time to upgrade your computer. How do you quickly grab all the files that are important to you? Or you decide to have two computers now – one for home and one for work. How do you quickly isolate only the work-related files to move them to the work computer?

WHY BOTHER ORGANIZING AT ALL?

Synchronize files to other computers. If you have more than one computer, and you need to mirror some of your files onto the other computer (e.g. your music collection), then you need a way to quickly determine which files are to be synced and which are not. Surely you don't want to synchronize *everything*?

Choose which files to back up. If your backup regime calls for multiple backups, or requires speedy backups, then you'll need to be able to specify which files are to be backed up, and which are not. This is not possible if they're all in the same folder.

TIPS ON GETTING ORGANIZED

1

Tip #1. Choose Your Organization System Carefully

2

Tip #2. When You Decide on Your System, Stick to It!

3

Tip #3. Choose the Root Folder of Your Structure Carefully

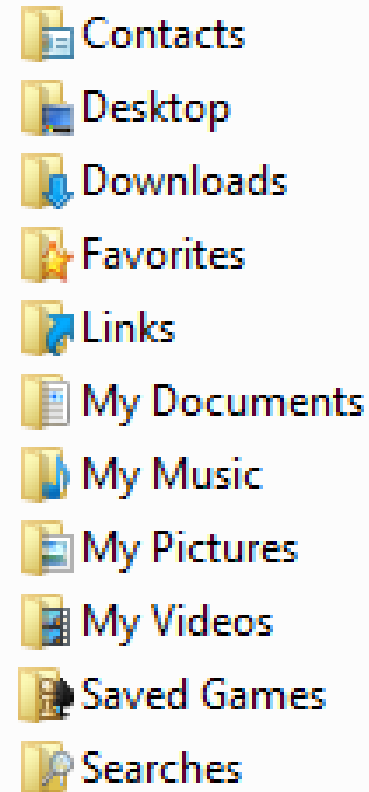
4

Tip #4. Use Sub-Folders

5

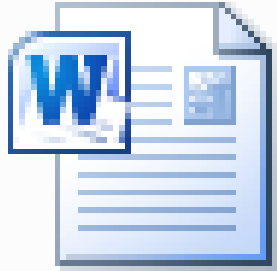
Tip #5. Don't be Shy About Depth

- *Tip #6. Move the Standard User Folders into Your Own Folder Structure*





MOVING THE FOLDERS IS EASY. SIMPLY DRAG-AND-DROP THEM TO THE NEW LOCATION. HERE'S A SCREENSHOT OF THE DEFAULT MY MUSIC FOLDER BEING MOVED TO MY CUSTOM PERSONAL FOLDER (MARK):



**Budget
Detail.docx**

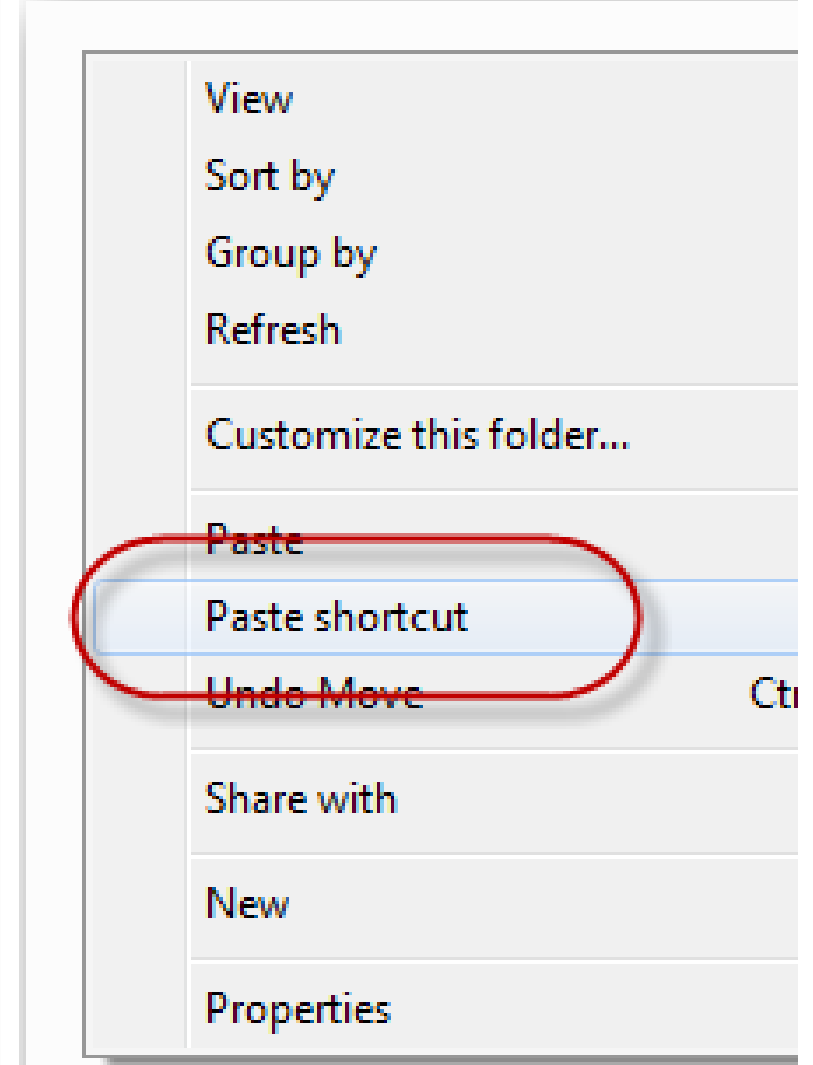
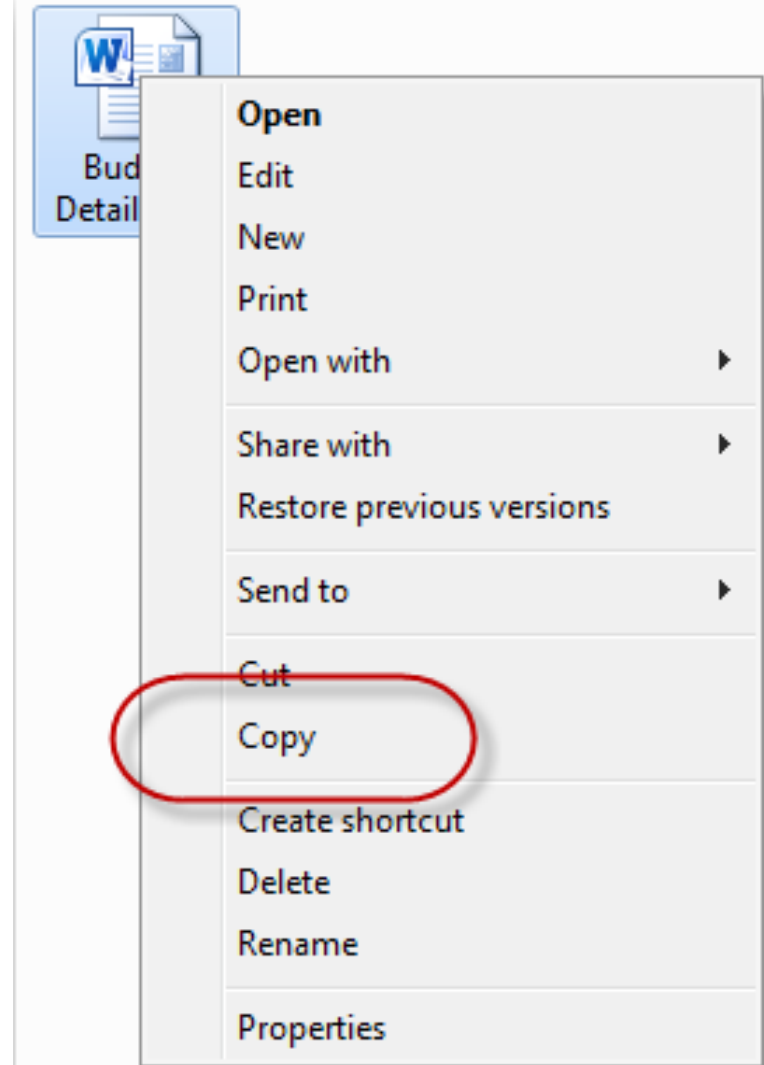


**Budget
Detail**

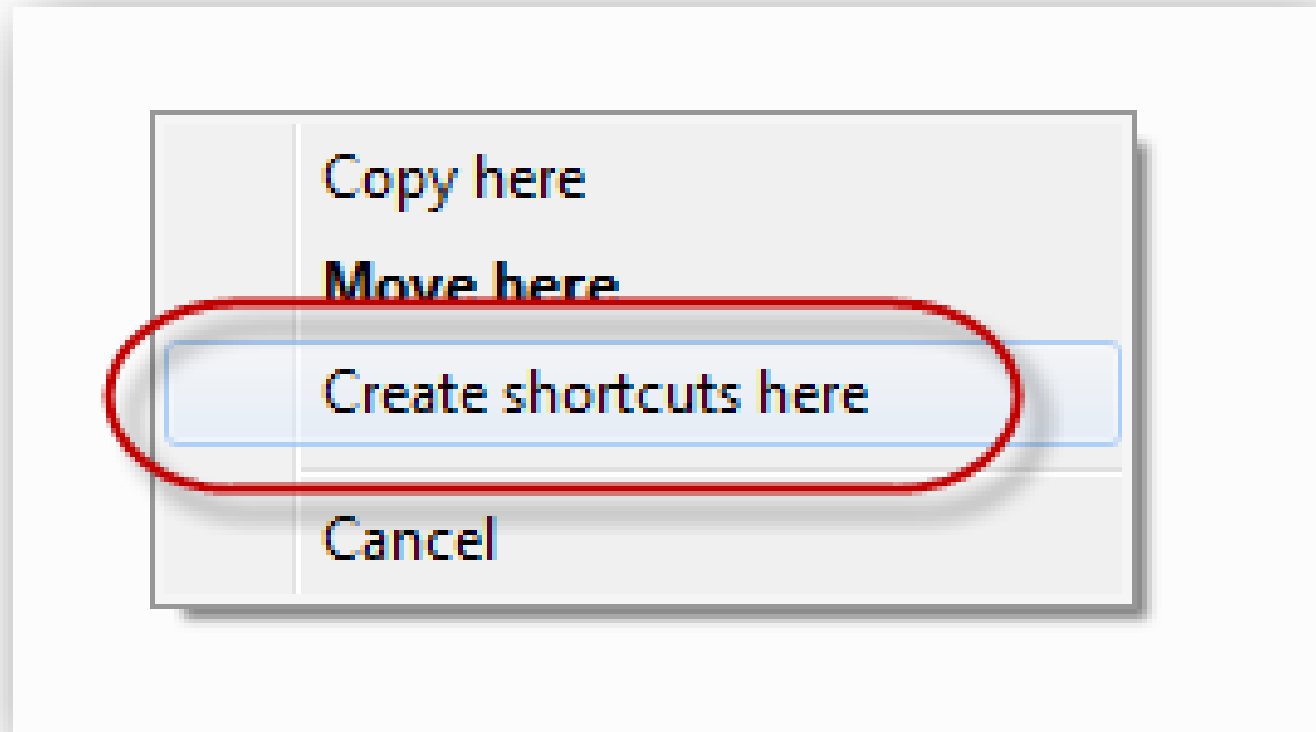
- *Tip #7. Name Files and Folders Intelligently*
- *Tip #8. Watch Out for Long Filenames*
- *Tip #9. Use Shortcuts! Everywhere!*

SO HOW TO WE CREATE THESE MASSIVELY USEFUL SHORTCUTS? THERE ARE TWO MAIN WAYS:

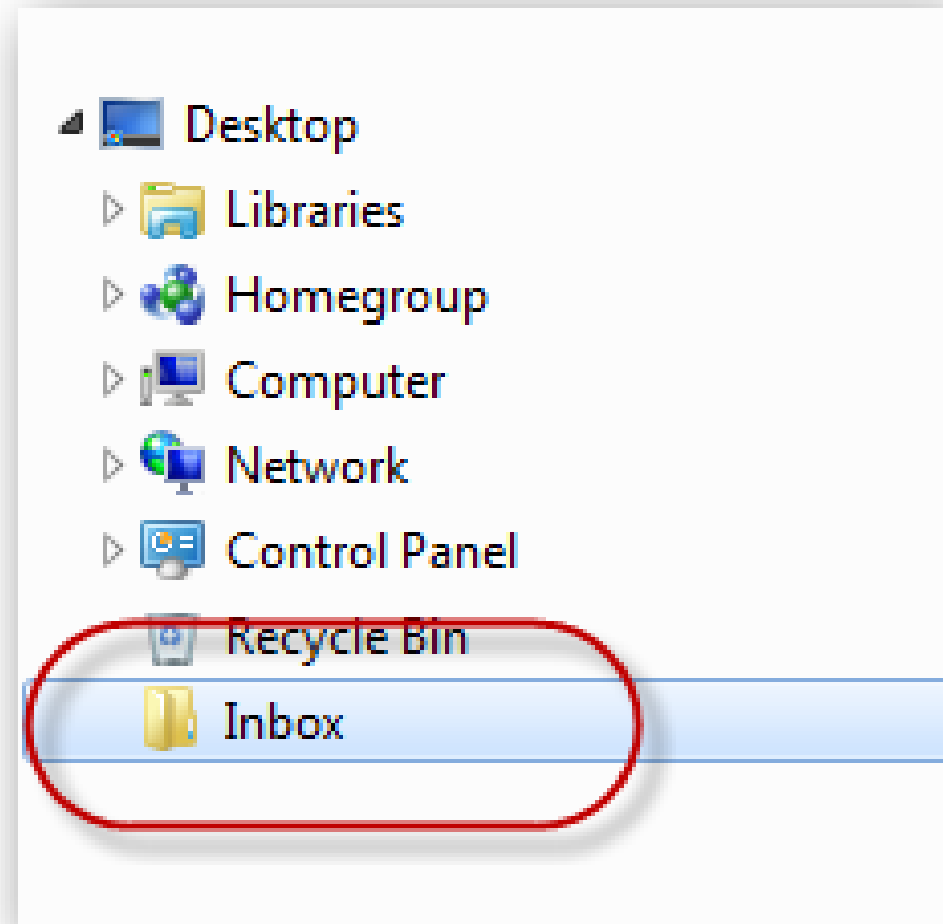
- “Copy” the original file or folder (click on it and type **Ctrl-C**, or right-click on it and select **Copy**):



RIGHT-DRAG (DRAG WITH THE RIGHT MOUSE BUTTON) THE FILE FROM THE SOURCE FOLDER TO THE DESTINATION FOLDER. WHEN YOU LET GO OF THE MOUSE BUTTON AT THE DESTINATION FOLDER, A MENU POPS UP:



- *Tip #10. Separate Application Files from Data Files*
- *Tip #11. Organize Files Based on Purpose, Not on File Type*
- *Tip #12. Maintain the Same Folder Structure on All Your Computers*
- *Tip #13. Create an "Inbox" Folder*



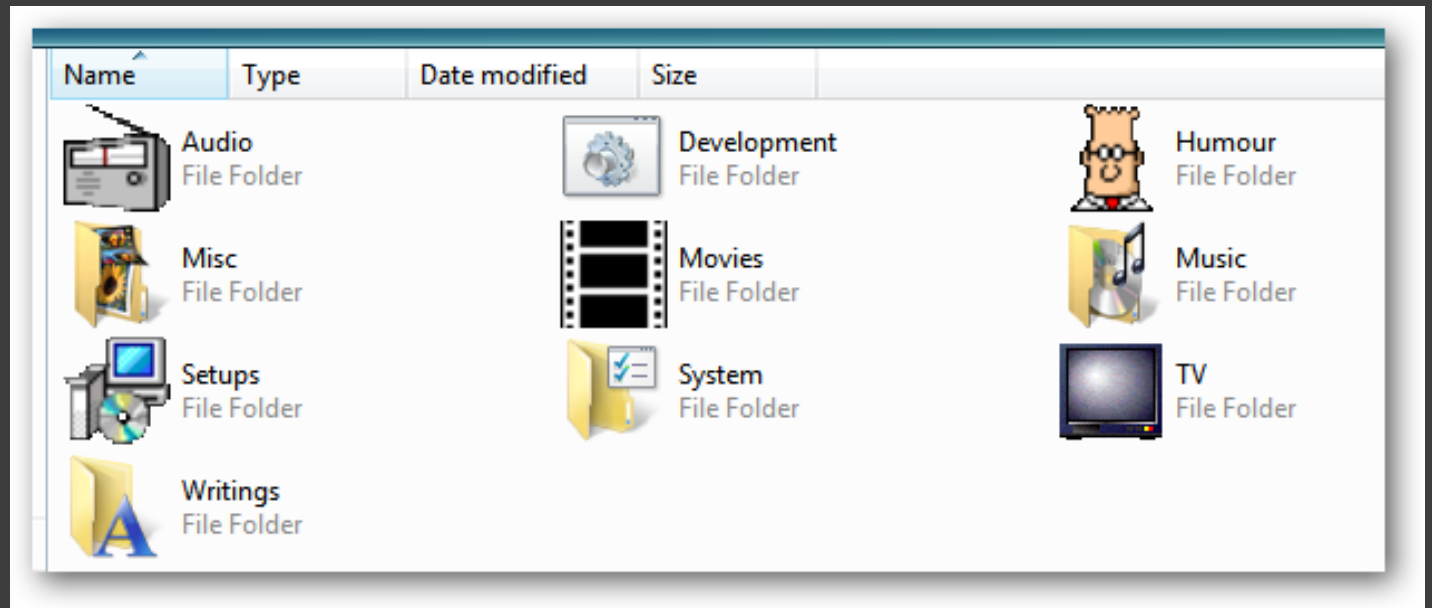


- **Tip #14. Ensure You have Only One “Inbox” Folder**

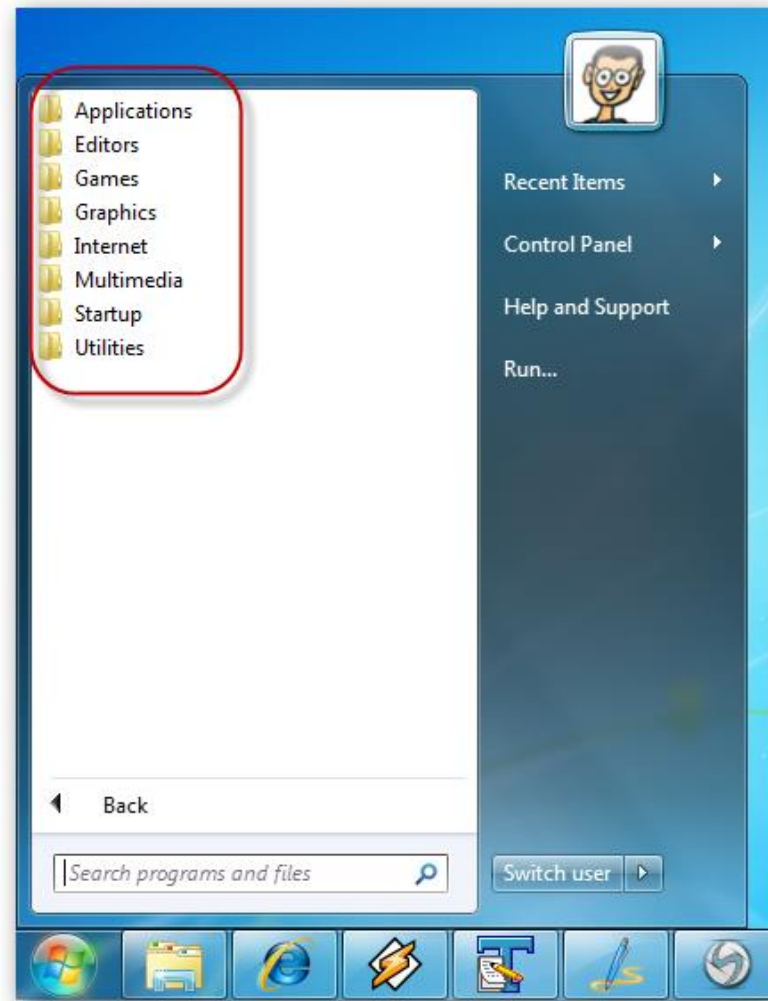
- *Once you’ve created your “Inbox” folder, don’t use any other folder location as your “to-do list”. Throw every incoming or created file into the Inbox folder as you create/receive it. This keeps the rest of your computer pristine and free of randomly created or downloaded junk. The last thing you want to be doing is checking multiple folders to see all your current tasks and projects. Gather them all together into one folder.*
- *Here are some tips to help ensure you only have one Inbox:*
 - *Set the default “save” location of all your programs to this folder.*
 - *Set the default “download” location for your browser to this folder.*
 - *If this folder is not your desktop (recommended) then also see if you can make a point of not putting “to-do” files on your desktop. This keeps your desktop uncluttered and Zen-like:*

-

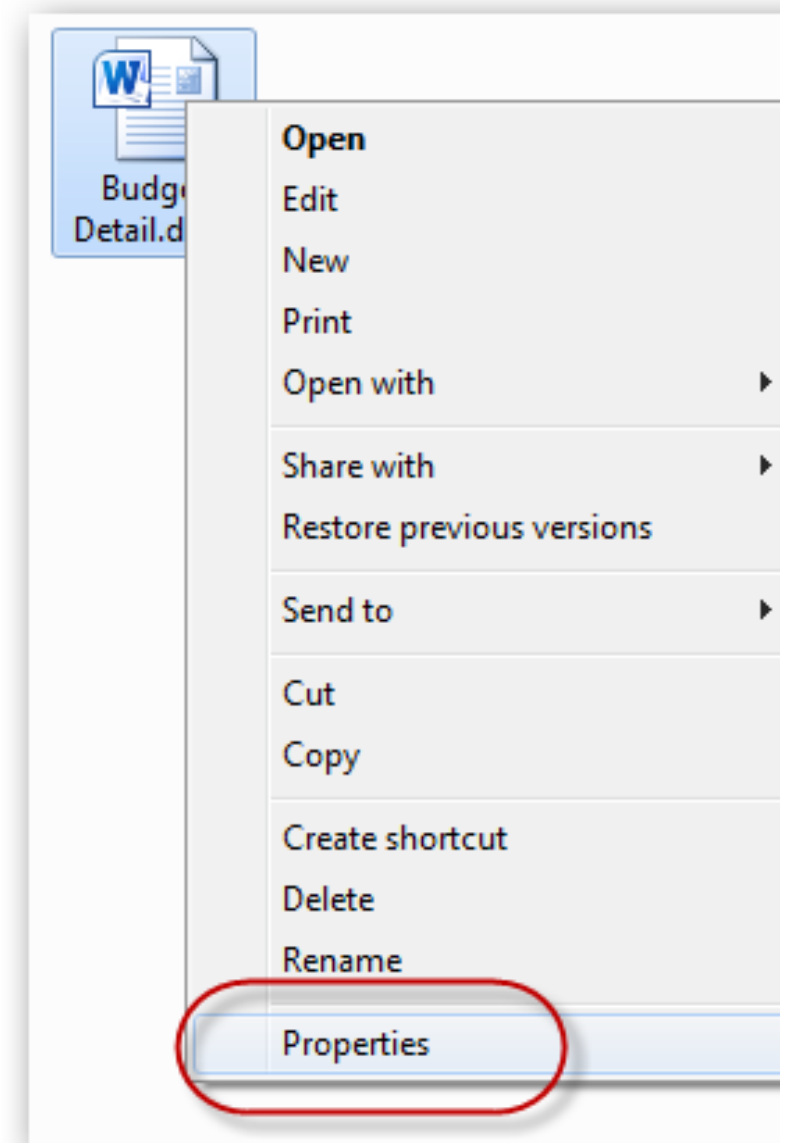
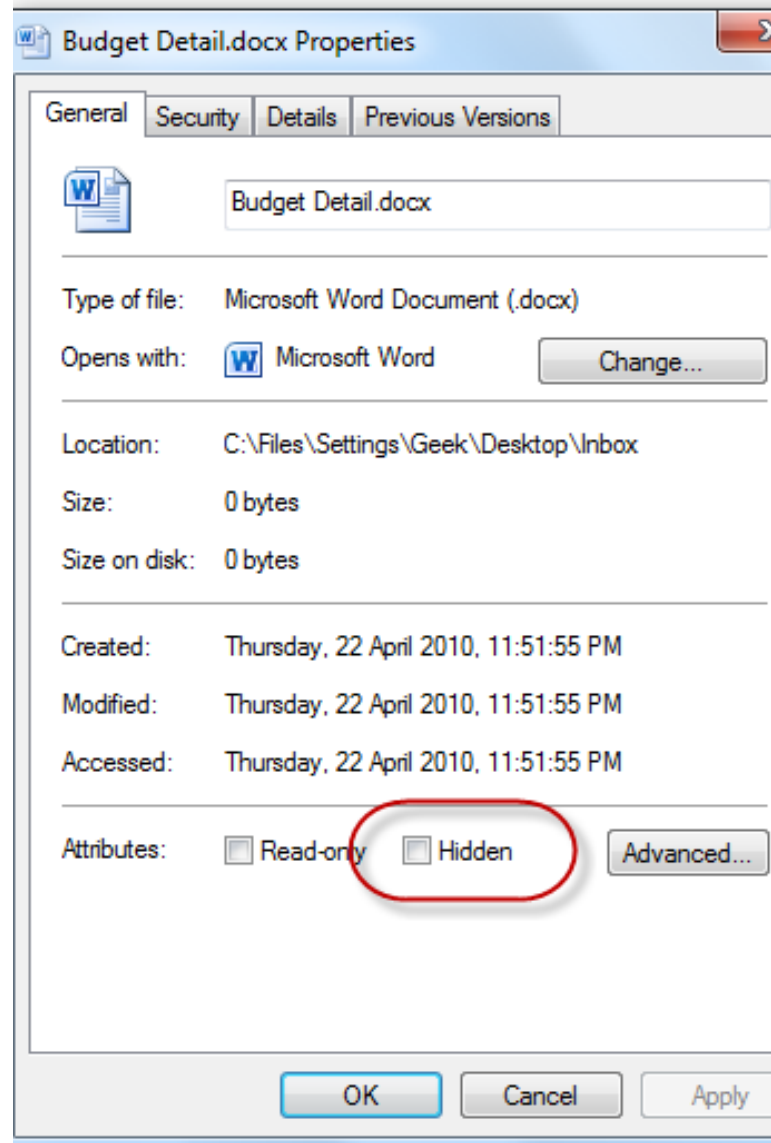
- *Tip #15. Be Vigilant about Clearing Your “Inbox” Folder*
- *Tip #16. File Everything Immediately, and Use Shortcuts for Your Active Projects*
- *Tip #17. Use Directory Symbolic Links (or Junctions) to Maintain One Unified Folder Structure*
- *Tip #18. Customize Your Folder Icons*



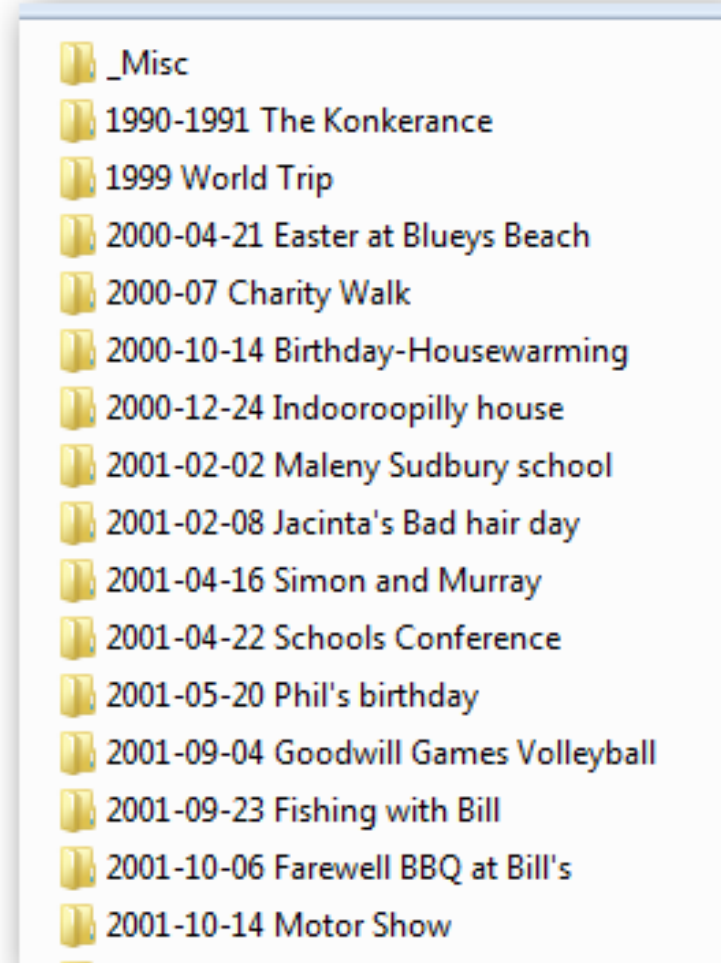
- *Tip #19. Tidy Your Start Menu*



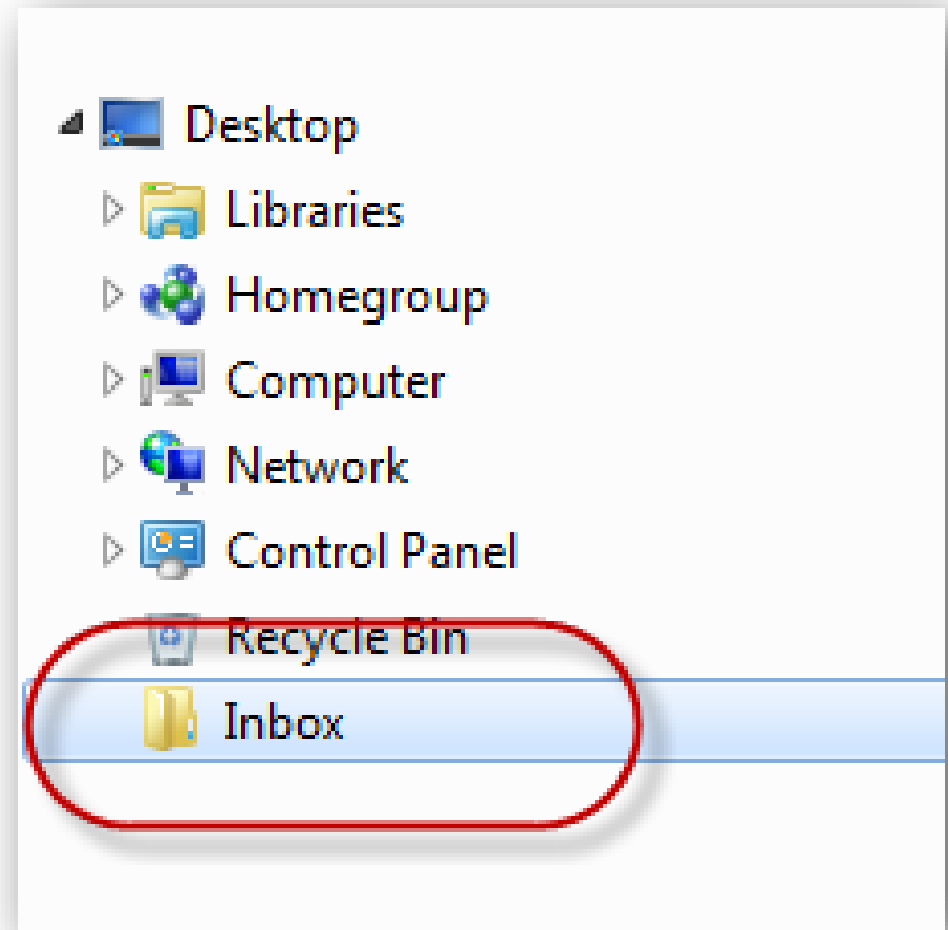
- *Tip #21. Tidy C:*
- *Tip #22. Tidy Your Desktop*
- *Tip #23. Move Permanent Items on Your Desktop Away from the Top-Left Corner*
- *Tip #24. Synchronize*
- *Tip #25. Hide Files You Never Need to See*
 - *To hide a file, simply right-click on it and choose **Properties**:*



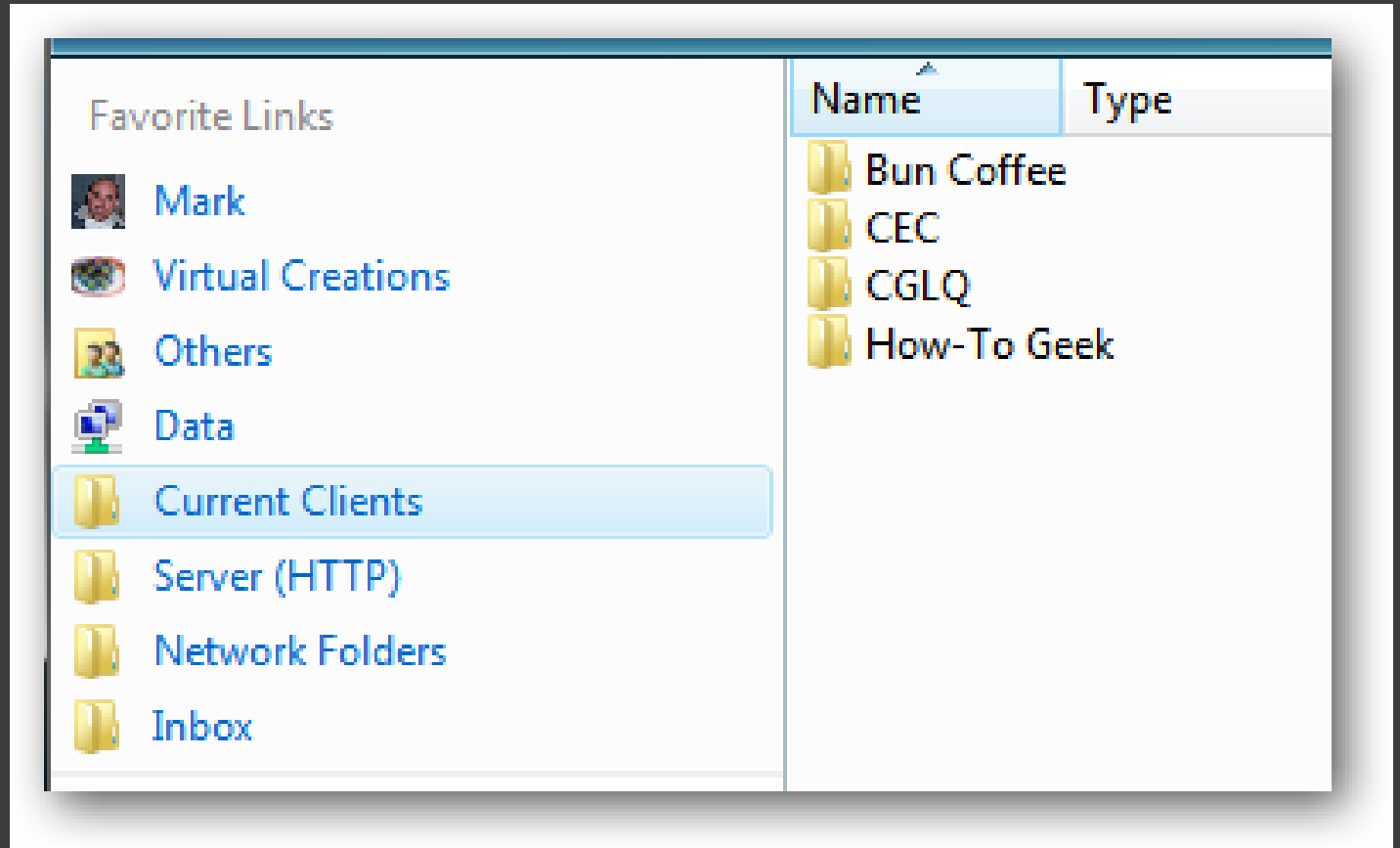
- *Tip #26. Keep Every Setup File*
- *Tip #27. Try to Minimize the Number of Folders that Contain Both Files and Sub-folders*
- *Tip #28. Starting a Filename with an Underscore Brings it to the Top of a List*



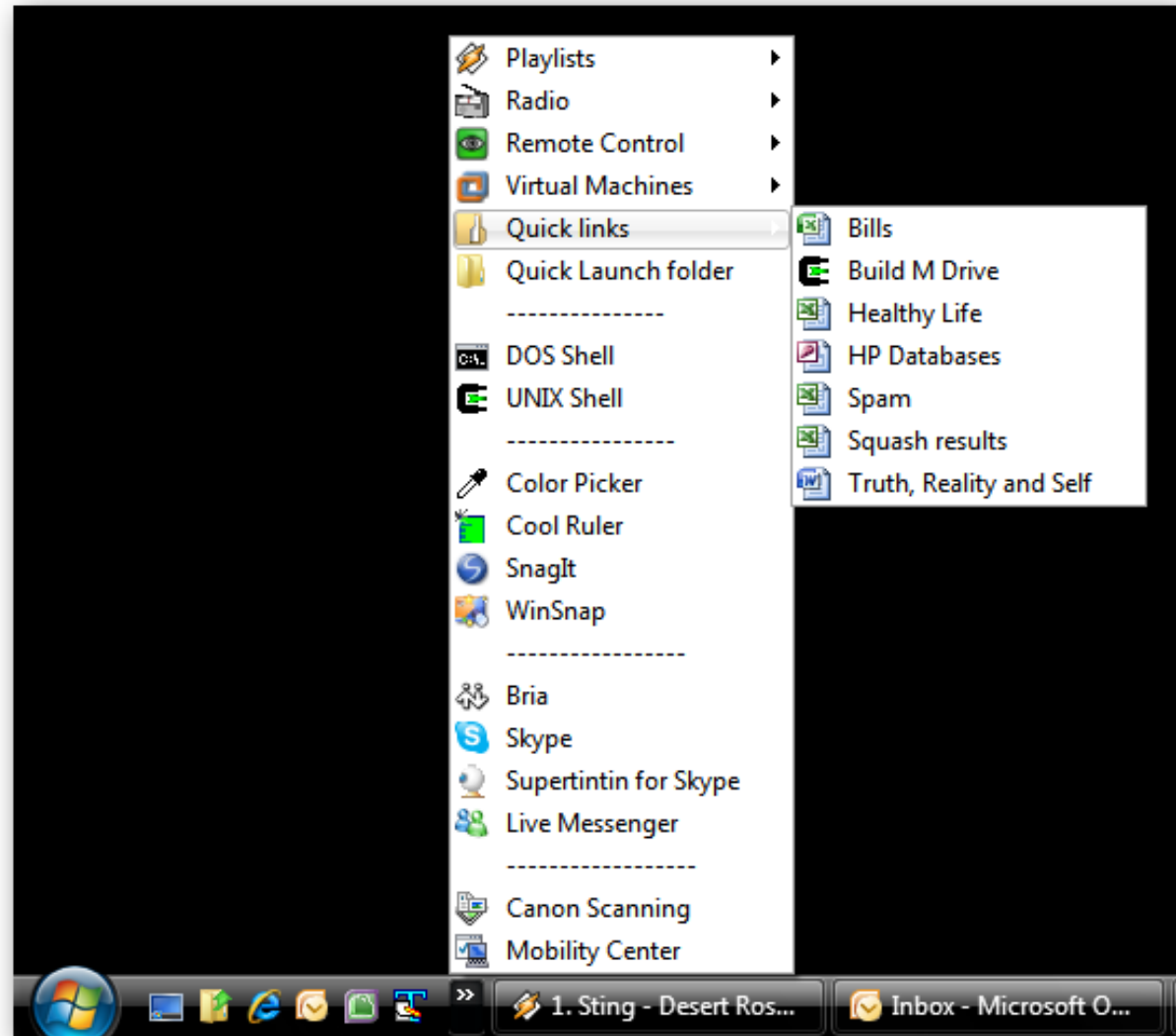
- *Tip #29. Clean Up those CD-ROMs and (shudder!) Floppy Disks*
- *Tip #30. Create an "Inbox" ("To-Do") Folder*



- *Tip #31. Create a Folder where Your Current Projects are Collected*

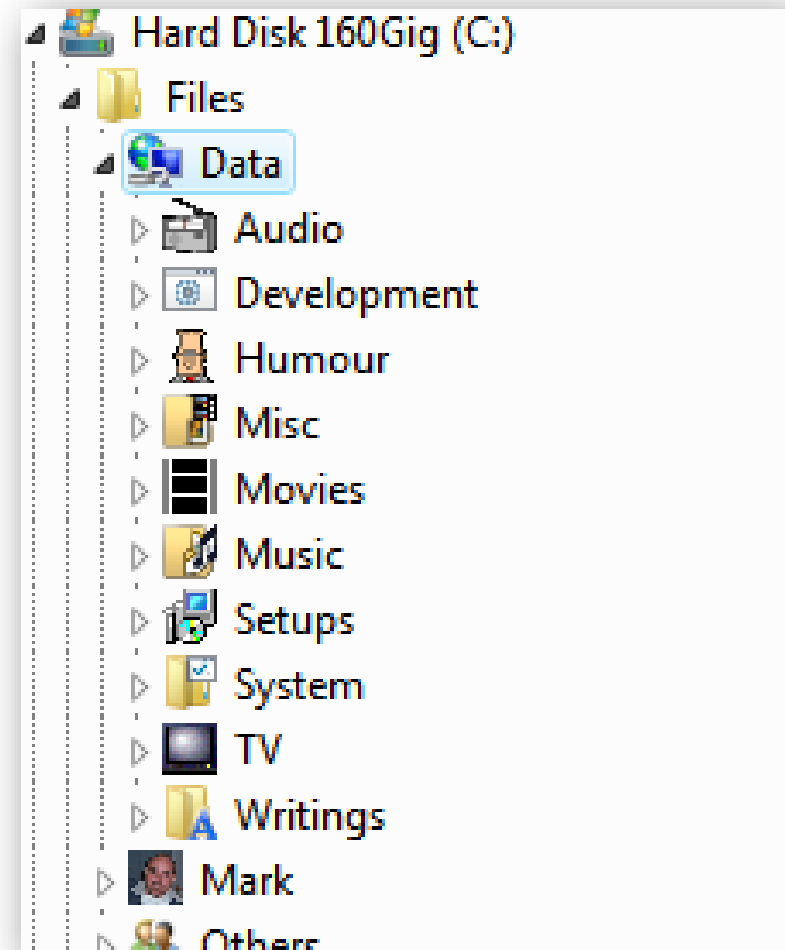


- *Tip #32. Create a Folder for Files and Folders that You Regularly Open*
-



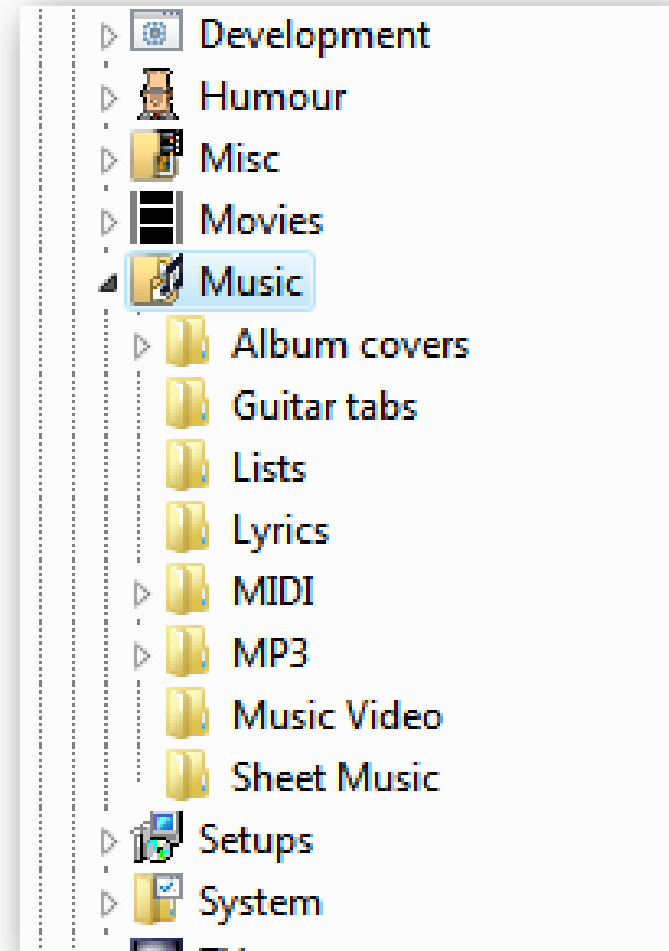
The Data folder contains the following sub-folders:

- Audio:** *Radio plays, audio books, podcasts, etc..*
- Development:** *Programmer and developer resources, sample source code, etc. (see below)*
- Humor:** *Jokes, funnies (those emails that we all receive)*
- Movies:** *Downloaded and ripped movies (all legal, of course!), their scripts, DVD covers, etc..*
- Music:** *(see below)*
- Setups:** *Installation files for software (explained in full in tip #33)*
- System:** *(see below)*
- TV:** *Downloaded TV shows*
- Writings:** *Books, instruction manuals, etc. (see below)*



The Music folder contains the following sub-folders:

- Album covers: JPEG scans*
- Guitar tabs: Text files of guitar sheet music*
- Lists: e.g. "Top 1000 songs of all time"*
- Lyrics: Text files*
- MIDI: Electronic music files*
- MP3 (representing 99% of the Music folder): MP3s, either ripped from CDs or downloaded, sorted by artist/album name*
- Music Video: Video clips*
- Sheet Music: usually PDFs*



BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZING COMPUTER FILES



SKIP THE DESKTOP.
NEVER EVER
STORE **FILES** ON
YOUR DESKTOP. ...



SKIP DOWNLOADS.
DON'T LET **FILES** SIT
IN YOUR
DOWNLOADS **FOLDER**. ...



FILE THINGS
IMMEDIATELY. ...



SORT EVERYTHING
ONCE A WEEK. ...



USE DESCRIPTIVE
NAMES. ...



SEARCH IS
POWERFUL. ...



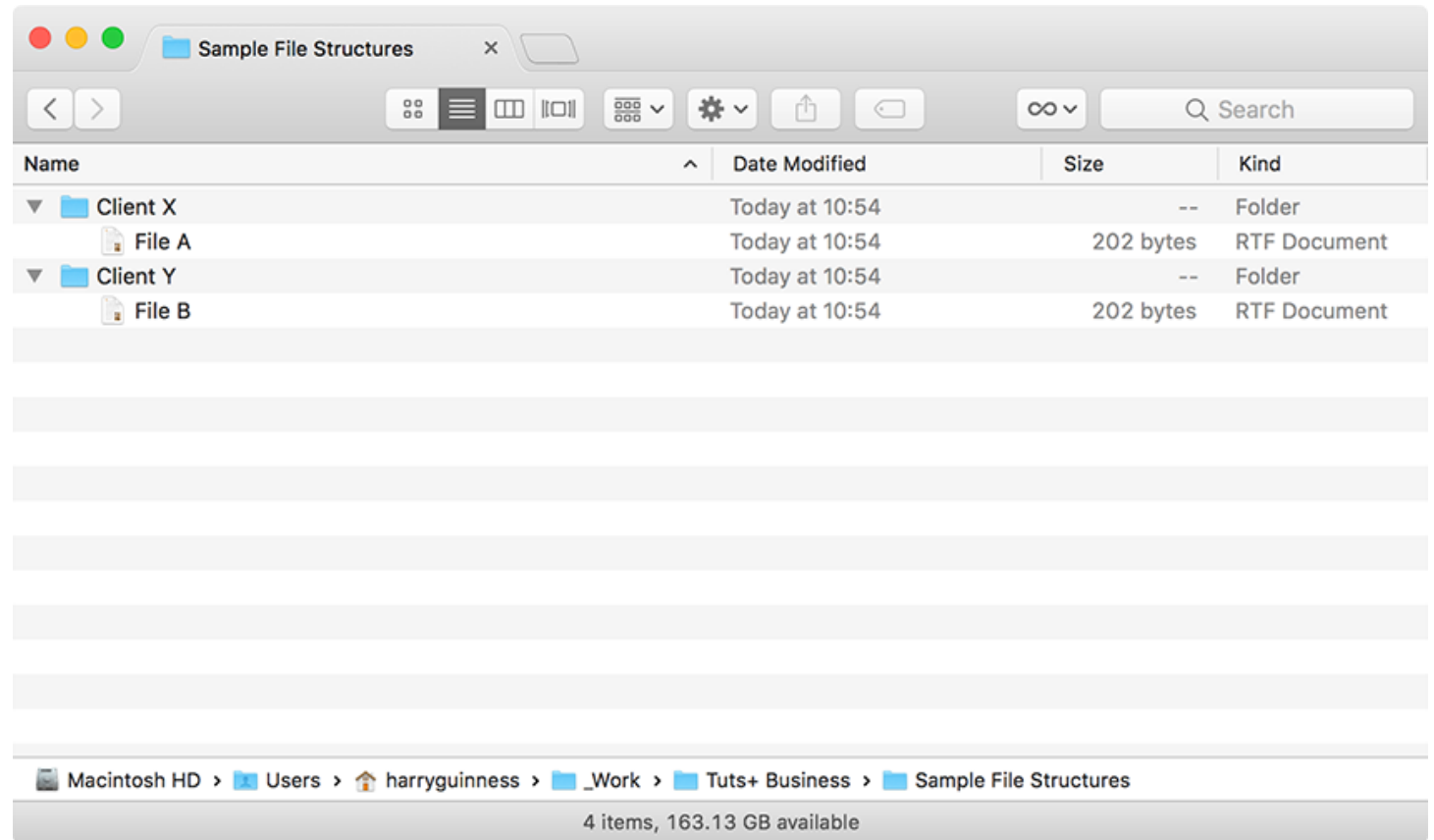
DON'T USE TOO
MANY **FOLDERS**. ...

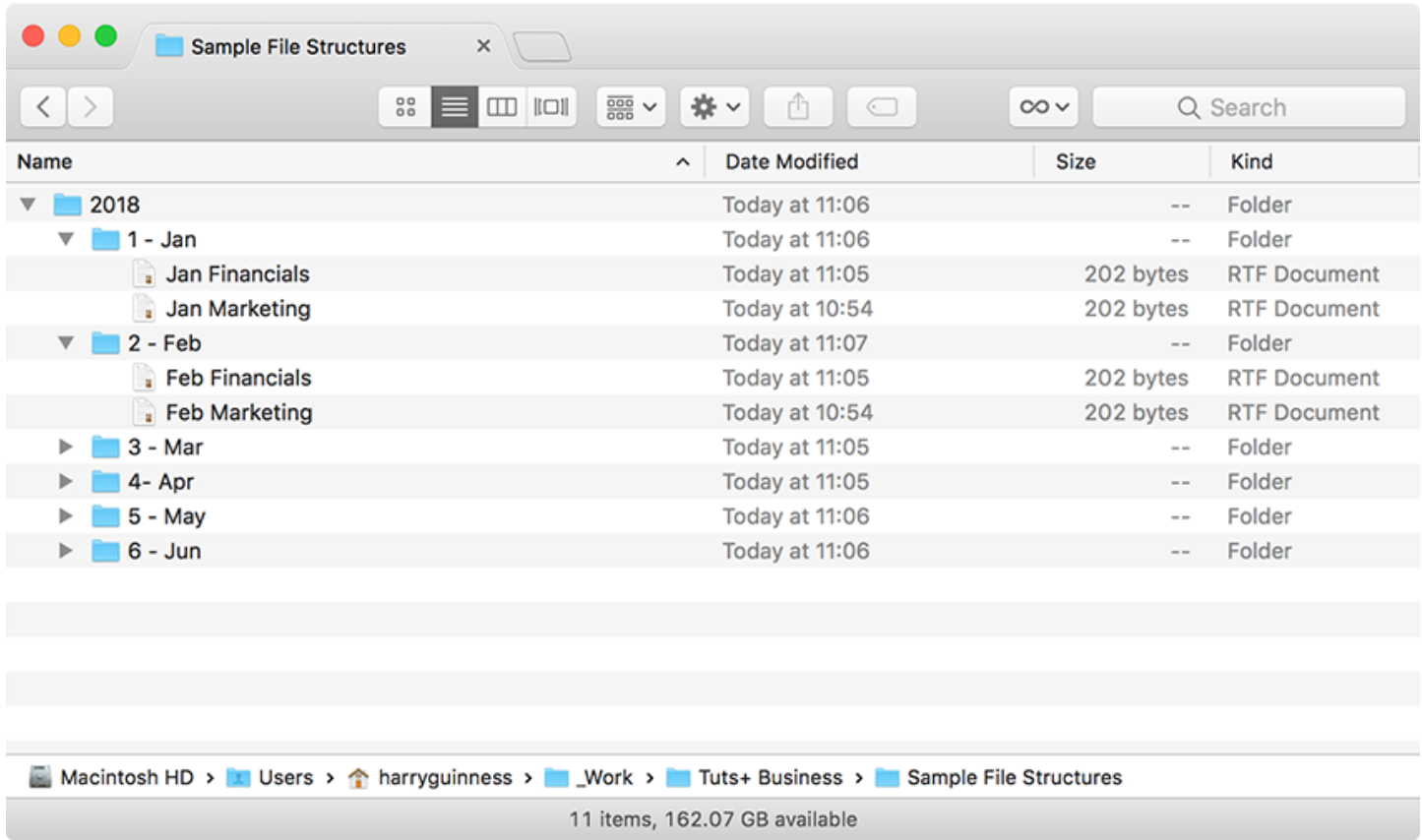


STICK WITH IT.

HOW TO ORGANIZE COMPUTER FILES: DECIDE ON A STRUCTURE

- **1. Project or Client-Based File Organization System**





2. DATE-BASED FILE ORGANIZATION SYSTEM

3. FILE TYPE-BASED FILE ORGANIZATION SYSTEM

-
- *A file type-based system groups everything into folders based on what kind of file it is. This doesn't strictly have to be by computer file type, but instead can use folders with names like:*
 - *marketing*
 - *presentations*
 - *financials*
 - *and the like*
 - *Within each folder, you put all the files of that kind.*

ONE IS NONE AND TWO IS ONE: BACKUPS

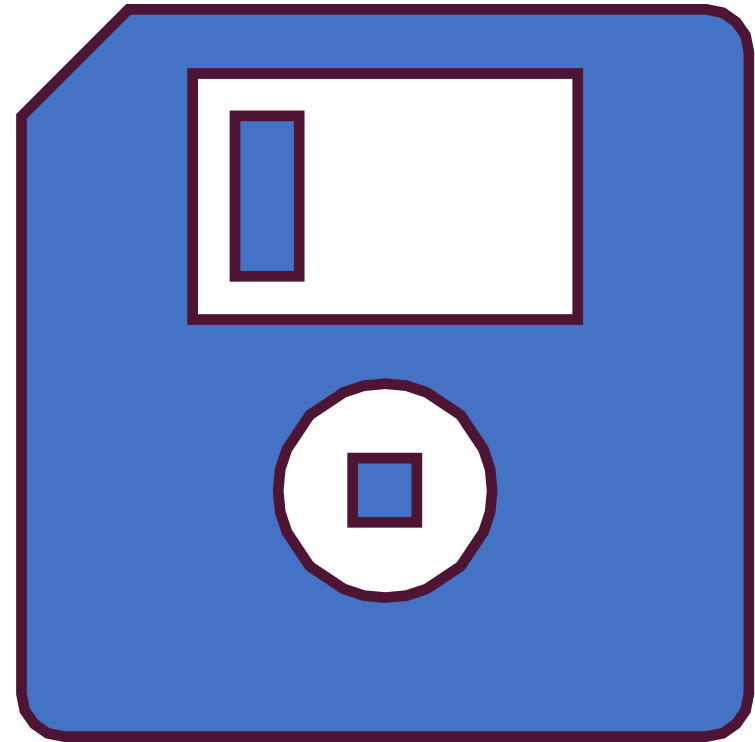
- We've got a full guide on how to create a foolproof back up plan as well as specific articles on backing up your PC or Mac, using Time Machine, so check those articles out for specific instructions. I'm just going to give a general overview here.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZING COMPUTER FILES

-
- *The most important thing about creating an organized file structure is that you stick to it. Here are some best practices for doing just that and also using your new, neat set up.*

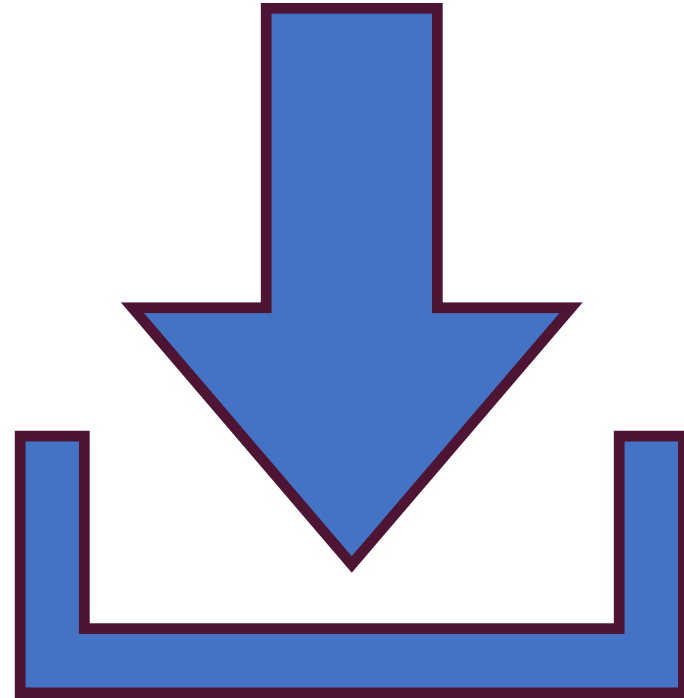
SKIP THE DESKTOP.

- *Never ever store files on your Desktop. It just looks messy and cluttered. It's okay to drag a file from a USB key to your Desktop, but then it should be filed away immediately.*



SKIP DOWNLOADS.

- *Don't let files sit in your Downloads folder. Either file them where they belong or delete them.*



FILE THINGS IMMEDIATELY.

-
- *If you wait to file things they'll get out of hand. As soon as you create or receive a file, put it in its proper place.*

SORT EVERYTHING ONCE A WEEK

- *With that said, either every Monday morning or Friday evening, look through the files you've worked on that week and make sure they're in the right place. Tidy things up, delete any unnecessary files, and generally stop things getting messy before they get too bad.*

USE DESCRIPTIVE NAMES

- *When you're naming your files, give them descriptive names. "Marketing plan" is bad. "Marketing Plan - Client X - January" is much better.*



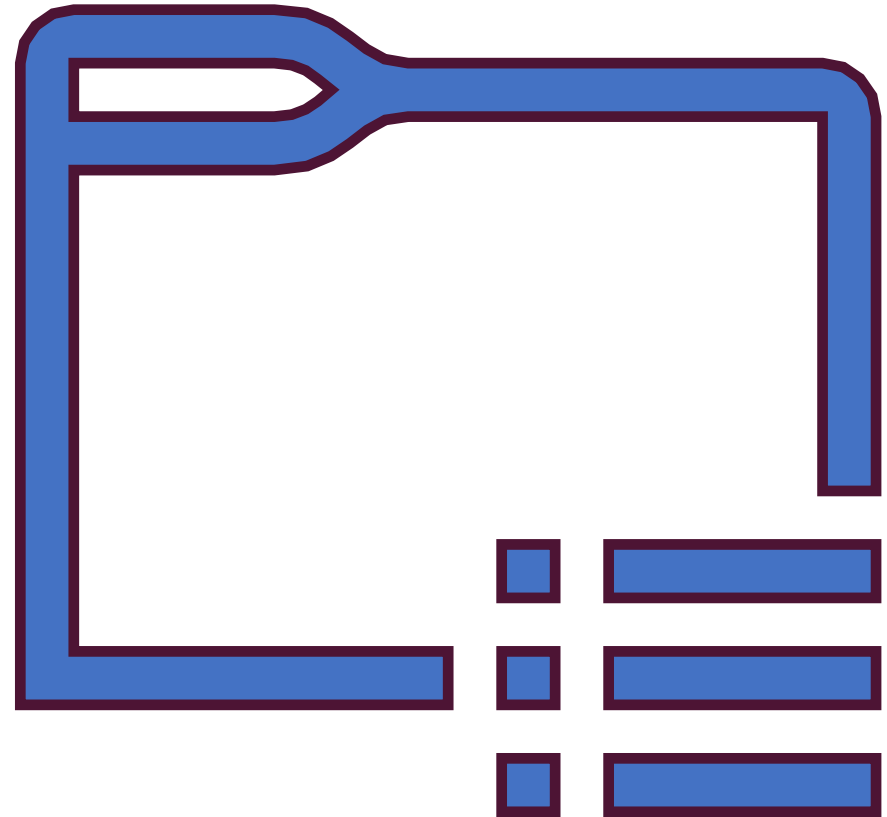
SEARCH IS POWERFUL.

- *The Search feature within modern operating systems is really powerful. If you can't find a file by looking, try searching for it. If you've named your files and folders correctly, it will be easy to find.*



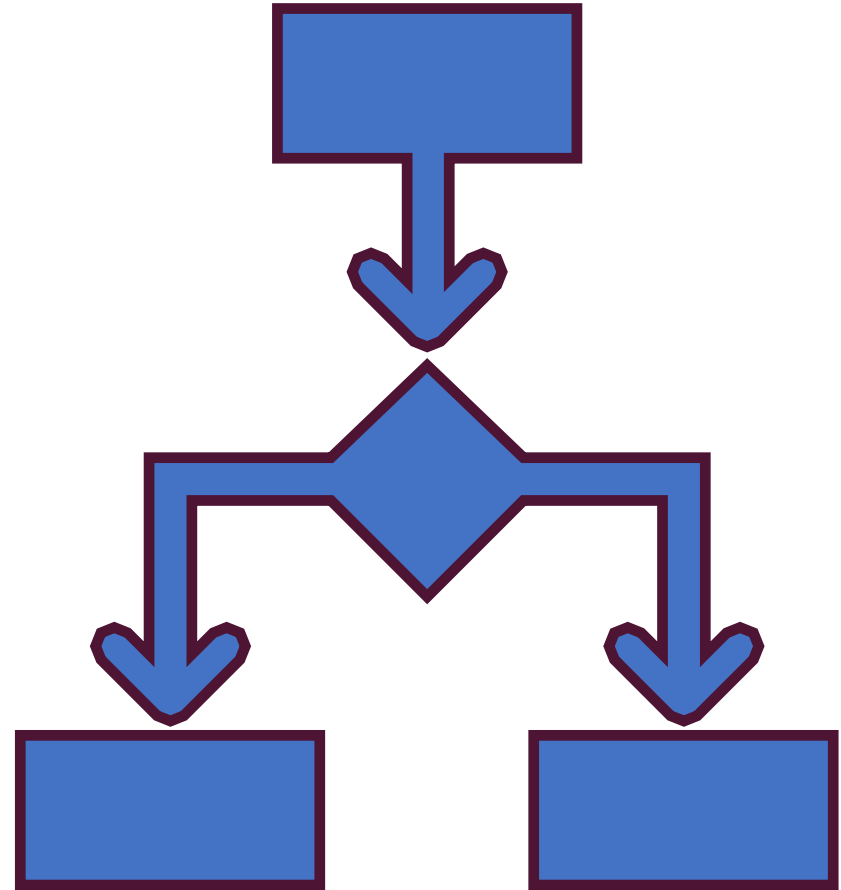
DON'T USE TOO MANY FOLDERS.

- *Having too many nested folders gets annoying. Each folder should have a minimum of about 10 files in it. If you only have two or three files in each folder, you need to reconsider your structure.*



STICK WITH IT.

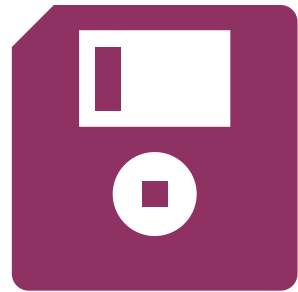
- *Don't just give up after a few days. It always takes a little time to adapt to something new. Commit to using your file structure for a couple of weeks before scrapping it.*



KEEP TWEAKING

-
- *Top down systems rarely work. Adapt it to your workflow rather than trying to force your workflow to adapt to a rigid file structure.*

WRAPPING UP



An organized computer is much more pleasant to use. If you know where every file is stored then it's no longer a nightmare when someone comes and asks for such-and-such file from two years ago; it's sitting in a folder and subfolder called 2016 > Marketing Materials or the like.



And once you've got a file organization system in place it's really not that hard to stick to. Just take a few hours one afternoon to set it up and you'll be good to go.

VIDEO REFERENCE SECTION

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKjRKZxr-KY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrO-jjf5Fl8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-LeibeXAog>